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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses upon the perceptions and the actions of the elementary school principal in the change process. Perceptions of change itself, of control, of the school system, and of the school staff are critical to his/her effectiveness in implementing change. To create an institutional climate that supports change, the principal must provide an administrative synthesis of the many elements of the school environment. The principal must first perceive the gestalt of the school situation with innovations in place; he then can bring the change about sequentially by applying linear, analytic methods to the planning and "building" of the climate element by element. The climate is developed through (1) holistic thought; (2) instructional modeling; (3) complete communications; and (4) planning the future. The relevance of such perceptions and actions can be seen in the application of administrative synthesis to inservice activities designed to develop teachers' group process skills and to meet other identified needs at an "open concept" elementary school. (Implications for those seeking to effect educational change through influencing the people in schools are pointed out). (RH)

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THE PRINCIPAL: KEY TO CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL

by

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Written for

The National Institute of Education

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I. THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE: CONSIDERING CHANGE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The premise of this paper is that the principal is the key to change in the elementary school. Whether the desired change is proposed by the teachers, the school board or the lawmakers, the principal's role will be instrumental to its successful implementation. Because the principal is responsible for the evaluation of the teachers, the supervision of the instructional program, the communications with the school community and the establishment of schedules and routines, s/he has the power to facilitate or to inhibit change. In a recent issue of Educational Leadership, Wendell Hough (1978) put it this way: "Since the individual school building is the largest unit in which significant and successful curriculum change can occur, those who make the real difference are the people in the school. In this sense, the school family is the principle source of power and influence, rather than forces external to the school." (p. 59) The principal, as head of that "school family," establishes the climate which facilitates or inhibits change. The very thought of change may bring either positive or negative connotations to the principal's mind. S/he may perceive "change" to be an opportunity for self and organizational renewal. Conversely, s/he may view "change" as an attack on the status quo. These opposite perceptions of change affect the actions the principal

takes and essentially determine the tone or "climate" of the individual school.

"The role of the principal," states Sarason (1971), may well be unique in the light it sheds both on the characteristics of the system and life in the classroom. . .whether or not the principal likes the proposed changes, s/he is in large part responsible for implementing those changes in fact and in spirit." (p. 111, 130) Implementing change is a difficult task for the principal. Those who would change the schools must assume major responsibility for providing assistance and impetus to the principal in this implementation role.

This paper focuses upon the perceptions and the actions of the principal in the change process. It is based upon the assumptions that an authentic need for a change has already been identified and that the principal and staff agree that the need for a change exists. Further, the assumptions are made that the elementary principal is in charge of a school of between 150 and 500 students, a part of a larger school system for which policies are set by a publicly elected board of directors. The principal has the autonomy to administer the school within the policy parameters, and is accountable to the superintendent.

When used in this paper, the term "change agent" refers to a power external to the individual school, a power which seeks to effect change through influencing the people in

that school. This power might be identified as the school district, a state agency or the federal government.

The examples in this paper are from actual experiences of the author, who has been a teacher and administrator in five Washington State school districts during the past twenty-three years. In all examples given, the situational elements were similiar to those existing throughout the given school district; that is to say, no special attention, staffing or budgetary advantages were given to the author's school to assist with the change process. Changes came about because the principal perceived the need, believed it could be accomplished, and utilized the skills of administrative synthesis to cause it to happen.

II. THE PRINCIPAL'S PERCEPTIONS: SETTING THE SCENE FOR CHANGE

The principal's perceptions of four major topics are critical to his/her effectiveness in implementing change. These topics include (1) perceptions of change itself, (2) perceptions of control, (3) perceptions of the school system, and (4) perceptions of the school staff. Each topic will be discussed separately.

Perceptions of change. The principal is compelled to recognize that change in the schools is a recurrent theme. Indeed, the principal with ten years' experience has lived through many changes with regard to his/her own role: from

centralized administration to decentralized, from interpreting the curriculum consultants' wishes to becoming an instructional leader, from explaining the school's decisions to the public to asking their participation in designing programs, from participating as a member of an education association to performing as a member of a management team. Change is all around the school, yet often the principal sees his/her role as a beleaguered attempt to ward off external change from hampering the functioning of the school. A principal with this negative view of change envisions his/her role as a supporter of the status quo, preserver of the past and present, and faces the future with cautious pessimism. His/her efforts become permeated with defense mechanisms, and great energy is expended in protecting "us" (within this school) from "them" (outer forces who seek to change the school). On the other hand, the principal who views change as self and organizational renewal may perceive his/her role as an opportunity to develop staff problem-solving abilities, to share participatory decision-making, to clarify goals based on identified student needs, and to seek assistance from resources outside of the school. His/her efforts are directed toward analyzing the current situation, providing relevant inservice to develop staff skills, and synthesizing the efforts of all into a purposeful whole. In reference to managing changing institutions, Toffler (1971) states:

". . .more and more sophisticated managers are recognizing

that in a world of accelerating change, reorganization is, and must be, an on-going process, rather than a traumatic once-in-a-lifetime affair." (p.131)

The effective principal knows that such on-going change must be related to the stable and enduring elements of the school. Goodlad (1975) contends that "schools derive a good deal of their stability and support by performing some exclusively educational functions in such a way that these are both visible and understood. Innovation is accepted and even applauded when it is designed and carefully explained . . .as a way of performing these basic functions better." (p. 8) He further states that "an effective change strategy is one through which the alternatives best suited to the needs of a given institution come to the attention of those in it and are used in a continuous process of improvement." (p. 19) The effective principal values this process of improvement, and seeks to facilitate its occurrence.

Perceptions of control. The principal must recognize the importance of his/her leadership to effecting change. The control of change is located within the school unit, and the proactive or reactive stance of the principal will determine the success or failure of changes that are initiated. Either stance is controlling, because the school climate is tempered by the manner in which the principal embraces or resists proposed change. The principal who has a strongly independent self-concept is not threatened when

change is proposed. S/he knows that a proactive stance permits shaping and direction of the action, and that early involvement in the planning stages is essential to controlling the outcomes. S/he perceives how his/her actions relate to the wider "picture" of the school system, and is able to function within the system's parameters with a high degree of freedom. A principal may perceive that changes are being proposed for the school without the involvement of the principal in the design. When this occurs, the control is technically removed from the principal. Since losing control over a situation represents a threat, the only possible stance is a reactive one. A reactive stance is a negative, defensive, protective view, and will most certainly work against any change that is initiated in that school.

Perceptions of the school system. The principal who views change as an opportunity for improvement and who views himself/herself as a proactive leader is able to view the school system itself as supportive to his/her efforts. This principal perceives that board policies, administrative procedures and district goals serve as a framework within which his/her school can operate effectively. These parameters are seen as providing guidance for the principal rather than imposing severe restrictions upon him/her. The principal also views the roles of other district staff members as supportive resources for the school. By drawing upon these resources, the principal can positively impact the efforts of

his/her school staff. Sarason (1971) describes the importance of realizing that the individual's conception of the school system "governs role performance even though it may be a correct or faulty conception." (p. 133, 134) His concern is that, too often, the school system is viewed by the principal in a manner that obscures the range of possibilities for action, serving instead as a basis for refusing to act in a flexible way. Conversely, a principal who views the system positively can use the resources available to assist his/her school's attempts to change.

Perceptions of staff. The principal who implements change effectively knows that change, whether it affects curricular content or instructional practice, requires the commitment of staff members. That commitment must be sought overtly and conscientiously by the principal, who never takes its existence for granted. The effective principal knows his/her staff members and values their participation in decision-making processes. S/he believes that all staff members have vital roles to play, and makes systematic provision for the involvement of teachers, specialist teachers, and non-certificated personnel in the processes of the school. This principal recognizes the powerful effect of combining the efforts of the school staff with school system support staff and external experts in the field to achieve the defined goals of the school. The principal's ability to include all personnel of the school is related to his/her perception of the system

and its parts, a kind of integrated thinking described by McGregor (1976) as "the creation of conditions such that the members of the organization can achieve their own goals best by directing their efforts toward the success of the enterprise." (p.134)

In creating such "conditions," the principal takes into account the fact that groups as well as individuals pass through developmental stages. The principal who knows his/her staff's readiness to participate in decision-making processes can involve them appropriately, working with them toward sequentially higher levels of competence in functioning together. If the staff has not previously functioned at a highly independent level, the principal begins at the appropriate level, instructing them with regard to his/her expectations for their performance in well-defined situations. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1976) state, in managerial terms, indicators of a staff's readiness to assume the responsibilities of participatory decision-making: "Each subordinate has a set of expectations about how the boss should act in relation to him. . .the better the manager understands these factors, the more accurately he can determine what kind of behavior on his part will enable subordinates to act more effectively." (p.34,38) The manager can permit the subordinates greater degrees of freedom if they:

-- have relatively high needs for independence,
-- have a readiness to assume responsibility for decision-making,

-- have a relatively high tolerance for ambiguity,
-- are interested in the problem and feel that it is important
-- understand and identify with the goals of the organization,
-- have the necessary knowledge and experience to deal with the problem, and
-- have learned to expect to share in decision-making.

The principal who perceives the staff as authentic participators in change assists them to analyze situations with consideration for both problems and opportunities which are inherent in them. S/he assists the staff in seeking solutions to the identified problems and in taking advantage of the identified opportunities. The principal assists the staff in perceiving themselves as major actors in the process of critical, relevant change which leads to the renewal of the school.

Summary. The principal's perceptions of change, control, system and staff affect his/her ability to establish a climate supportive to change. The importance of this climate has been documented in the Rand Study of Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Volume II (1975): "The effective implementation of innovative projects was primarily dependent on a supportive institutional setting and on an implementation strategy that fostered the mutual adaptation of the staff to the project's demands and of the project's design to the reality of its setting. . .Elementary school principals appear to have been 'gatekeepers' of change, either facilitating or inhibiting implementation." (p.65,84)

Section III will discuss the principal's application of "administrative synthesis" in developing a climate for change.

III. THE PRINCIPAL'S APPLICATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SYNTHESIS: DEVELOPING THE CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

Administrative synthesis: definition. Benjamin Bloom, in his Cognitive Taxonomy (1956), defined synthesis as "the putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole. This is a process of working with elements, parts, etc., and combining them in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before. Generally, this would involve a recombination of parts of previous experience with new material, reconstructed into a new and more or less well-integrated whole." (p.162) The ability to synthesize is critical to putting together the supportive institutional climate which contains such myriad "elements" as students with varying needs, parents with divergent views, classroom teachers with different experiences and abilities, specialist teachers and support personnel with conflicting opinions, classified staff with varying abilities, an organizational hierarchy with established policy parameters, external change agents with specific expectations, local schedules with varying flexibility, financial resources with "strings attached," and on and on, ad infinitum. When these elements are placed in a school setting, the school principal's task becomes

challenging and extremely complicated. This task requires the principal to combine many elements in such a way that the new "whole" benefits the students. The process of synthesizing has been attributed to the activity of the right hemisphere of the brain, as reported by Ornstein (1972): "If the left hemisphere is specialized for analysis, the right hemisphere. . .seems specialized for holistic mentation . . .if the left hemisphere can be termed predominantly analytic and sequential in its operation, then the right hemisphere is more holistic and rational, and more simultaneous in its mode of operation." (p.52) He further proposes that "it is the polarity and the integration of these two modes of consciousness, the complementary workings of the intellect and the intuitive, which underlie our highest achievements." (p.65) Designing a school climate supportive to change demands the use of these complementary hemispheric functions in which the principal perceives the gestalt of the situation with innovations in place, then sequentially brings it about by applying linear, analytical methods to the planning and "building" of the climate, element by element.

Goodlad (1975) refers to the missing ingredient of synthesis in his reference to the past decade of schooling: ". . .curricular, organizational, and instructional reform proceeded separately and disparately, hardly anyone providing a synthesis of what all this might add up to in a given school. . .Much of what went on was a little like seeking to

improve the quality of family life without either an image of a family and what it might look like or any way of reaching it as an entity." (p.45) Further, if "the school is itself an agent of and for change. . . for the curriculum of a school to change and go on changing there must be a kind of momentum in that school. . .a disposition toward making such a change, to remaking it, and to making it once again." (p.61) This momentum is dependent on the school's ability to behave as a cohesive, organized entity. If the school does "behave" in this manner, it is largely due to the principal's "ability to conceptualize the whole so as to visualize other possibilities and how specific steps and innovations might lead to them." (p.62)

Administrative synthesis: actions. When the principal performs at a synthesis level of thought, s/he takes specific actions which create the climate for change. In this supportive institutional climate, teachers find it possible to risk changing their behaviors as they come to view themselves (as well as the principal) as life-long learners. They come to realize that the principal's overall goal is the improvement of instruction for students, and that this goal requires their valued involvement. A climate such as this is created by the principal's specific actions in four major categories which the author presents as (1) holistic thought, (2) instructional modeling, (3) complete communications and (4) futuristic

considerations. Each category will be discussed in this section.

(1) Holistic thought. The principal learns to look at entire situations as a network of interdependent relationships. This might be termed an ecological method by which the principal seeks to gain a larger perspective of the total environment around and within the local school. S/he examines all of the actors in the process of schooling, and gives credibility to their ideas, values and talents. In holistic thought, the principal is primarily concerned with the relationships between the elements of a given situation. This enables the principal to view the overall pattern, even though some of the elements may be missing. The view of the overall pattern enables the principal to recombine the elements in such a way that a new "whole" is created. The principal shares this conceptualizing with the staff, providing opportunities for them to think holistically about the school and its effect on students. A sense of purpose, direction and momentum is generated for the school. As stated by Mink, Schultz and Mink (1979) "Leaders build credibility through their ability to use a system-wide perspective to solve problems, symbolize organization purposes, and persuade others to these purposes." (p.10)

Holistic thinking permits the principal to conceptualize the new entity with innovations in place. It also requires the careful analysis of the elements and their interrelationships

so that the new design carefully builds upon them. The design of the new situation must take into account the schedules and routines--the allocation of time--if its implementation is to be successful. Goodlad (1975) refers to such schedules and routines as "regularities," defined as "fixed or recurring routines by means of which schools conduct their daily business. . .Institutions must regularize their activities; innovations propose to change regularities in some way." (p.13) When those regularities can be changed, innovations that will continue become, in essence, the new "regularities." The schedules and routines, in other words, comprise the mortar which holds the separate elements together to form the newly-built "whole."

An example of the author's application of holistic thought may clarify this concept. Principal Smith was made aware of the need for the classroom teachers in her school to engage in team planning. A block of time for this specific purpose was created through the consideration of another need: itinerant specialist teachers needed to relate their instructional activities to each other and to have time to become better acquainted with students. The specialist teachers were grouped as a team, with time for planning together to deliver their services during a given block of time to the students of a classroom team. The classroom teachers were scheduled for team planning activities during this time block. The specialist teachers were able to relate

instructional activities and to benefit from their wider perspectives gained through working together. They became better acquainted with their students by working with them for longer periods of time and by seeing other specialist teachers' points-of-view. The classroom teachers were able to devote a block of time each week to the planning of team activities. The students benefited from the improved instructional planning. This situation was made possible by Principal Smith's holistic conceptualizing of a possible innovation and by her careful rescheduling of the elements to make the implementation successful.

(2) Instructional modeling. The successful principal realizes that this leadership role is really an instructional one. The principal perceives the gestalt of learning to be developmental and continual, whether the learner is a child, parent or administrator. Because of this perception, the principal seeks to model the behavior s/he expects from teachers. Modeling provides the staff with a clear picture of a concept and clarifies the expectations of the principal. It permits the principal to label the elements and to discuss their relationships to the whole. The use of modeling enhances the principal's efforts to build cohesive group decision-making skills. As an instructor, the principal sets clear objectives which are appropriate for the staff. S/he provides opportunities for the staff to learn to perform

the objectives which are appropriate for the them. S/he provides opportunities for the staff to learn to perform the objectives. S/he does not assume that learning has occurred just because s/he has presented an opportunity; s/he frequently checks the staff's understanding of the stated objectives.

A real-life example of instructional modeling will serve to clarify this concept. Principal Smith, in seeking to develop a climate for change, recognized that her staff had not previously functioned in a group decision-making situation. She desired to involve them in designing strategies for improving the reading program for primary students, a need they previously had helped to identify. She scheduled a staff meeting with the purpose of "brainstorming" all the possible causes for the students' deficiencies in reading skills. Her overall goal was to assist the teachers in the careful analysis of the situation before proceeding to the further steps of identifying potential solutions and selecting one or more for implementation. Although the purpose of the meeting had been publicized, some teachers came to the staff meeting with pre-defined "solutions" to meet the need. One teacher stated, "We all should teach reading for sixty minutes per day; there presently isn't enough time to get the job done." Another suggested, "If we could purchase these new materials, we could improve the program." Principal Smith clearly re-stated the objective of this meeting and

carefully defined the brainstorming technique. She showed the staff where this procedure fit into the whole of decision-making, and emphasized her belief that careful analysis of the situation would assist with the identification of possible solutions. She then listed one "possible cause" of students' reading deficiencies, and encouraged the participation of the staff in brainstorming further causes. At a later meeting, Principal Smith referred back to this procedure, again identifying its place in the decision-making process.

(3) Complete communications. The successful principal values everyone's participation in school functions. S/he establishes a communications network which becomes an integral part of the school. The network is designed to provide for the interaction of all staff, parents and students. The communications network provides for both formal and informal types of feedback to the principal. S/he works with staff, student and parent groups to clarify the ways in which they will advise the principal. S/he is careful to design ways in which the various advisory groups will interact with each other. Care is taken to provide for representation of all grade levels, itinerant staff, non-certificated staff, parents from various neighborhoods, etc. If there are special programs located in the school, these are also represented. The principal understands two-way communication, and provides ample time and opportunity

for feedback to be gathered and considered. S/he is clear about reporting back to the groups, indicating the considerations given to their input.

In addition to these provisions for group involvement, there are opportunities for individual participation. Parents are encouraged to visit classrooms. Teachers are given the opportunity to visit in each other's classrooms, and students are encouraged to visit other classes and to discuss their concerns and ideas. The principal is a frequent visitor to the classrooms. S/he schedules formal observations for the purpose of supervision and evaluation of teacher performance. But, equally important, s/he makes numerous informal visits to the classroom to participate in activities, to show support for the teachers, and to understand the students. S/he believes that the staff's trust level will rise when they see that the principal cares enough to "be there." S/he also encourages teachers, parents and students to make "drop-in" visits to discuss ideas with the principal. Because s/he thoroughly knows what is occurring in the school, the principal can speak with credibility about student needs and about indications that changes might be worth considering. Teachers and parents, who find the principal's statements believable, will be ready to participate in analyzing situations and assisting in making decisions to seek appropriate innovations.

An example of one school's communications network will illustrate this category. Principal Smith worked with the people in her school for two years to establish a complete communications network. It included formal and informal processes for students, staff and parents. A student council, staff advisory council, and parent advisory council met separately with Principal Smith, but each group had a liaison with the other groups. The student council, with representatives from each classroom, met weekly with a faculty advisor, and brought concerns and ideas periodically to the staff advisory council. The staff council, with representatives from each teaching team, itinerant specialists, and non-certificated staff, met weekly to take action regarding the functioning of the school. The parent council met monthly to study issues in depth as proposed by the staff, PTA or principal. A parent council member served on the PTA board, as did a teacher representative.

In addition to formal group communications, Principal Smith established times to meet informally with the specialist team, guidance team, and teaching teams. She set aside time on her calendar for weekly "walk-through" visitations, after which she left a short note for the teacher. She scheduled the required formal observations at times mutually acceptable to teacher and principal, and held a conference before and after each observation, to discuss the particular segment of instruction observed.

The formal observation fit into the annual teacher evaluation cycle, which began in the fall with the teacher's identification of professional goals for the academic year. Goals were related to school or district needs as well as to the teacher's own performance. Strategies for achieving the goals were proposed, and methods for evaluation were selected. At mid-year, Principal Smith held an individual conference with each teacher to discuss the progress in goal achievement.

In addition to the routine communications network above, Principal Smith published a weekly newsletter to parents and a daily bulletin for staff. She set aside an hour each week to telephone parents of students who had accomplished something noteworthy. She was often seen in the lunchroom and on the playground, visiting with students. Much time was spent in listening. . .and more listening. As the communication channels were established and honored, Principal Smith noted the openness which had begun to characterize the climate of the school.

(4) Futuristic considerations. The successful principal accepts the necessity for self and organizational renewal. S/he realizes that time must be appropriated for planning for the future. Periodic planning sessions are held with the staff, and consideration is given to the questions: Where will we be in a year? Where would we like to be?

What will our students need to learn in order to cope with change? Extending the thinking of the staff moves the focus from the "regularities" of the school to the broader purposes, after which annual goals can be established. Innovations are based upon enduring elements, and relate directly to student needs. Change becomes an accepted part of growth, with its focus the improvement of instruction. New goals are established as old goals are evaluated, providing for a cyclical approach to change.

The principal keeps up-to-date on trends in education by reading and attending conferences. S/he makes certain that staff is informed about local events, district goals, and national trends. Staff members are encouraged to participate in professional development activities, and their growing expertise is noted and utilized. The principal is aware of enrollment trends and financial condition of the district. S/he provides opportunities for staff to assist with the formation and appropriation of the school's instructional budget, setting aside contingency funds for future needs. S/he involves the staff in curriculum planning and content articulation betwen grade levels. The principal emphasizes the importance of formative evaluation methods, assisting the staff to identify a variety of methods for evaluating the effectiveness of the instructional program.

Because school-wide goal-setting, strategy-planning, data-gathering and evaluation are cyclical processes, change

is a natural result. Those things which are effective can be continued; those things which are not effective are changed.

Principal Smith's school again provides an example of futuristic considerations. Each spring, Principal Smith leads the staff of her school in synthesizing the results of a variety of evaluative activities which have been conducted throughout the year. An annual survey of seventh graders who have attended this elementary school is conducted, complete with their earned grades in the first semester of junior high school and their opinions about the effectiveness of their elementary education. A parent opinion survey is conducted to parallel the seventh grade student survey. The annual goals for the school are evaluated. The results of student competency tests in reading, writing and math are made available. The students have been asked from time to time to evaluate major units of study, and these results are discussed.

The data are analyzed, categorized and compared with staff expectations. The parents, students and staff are made aware of the results and share in the process of considering the direction that is indicated. Plans are developed for major areas of emphasis during the following school year and tentative goals are established. Principal Smith meets with a steering committee to design a staff inservice program, based upon the needs of the school. The steering committee communicates with the entire staff and designs the

program, complete with topic(s), external resources, delivery system(s) and incentives for teachers. Teachers leave for the summer, knowing the direction and focus for September, and momentum is built for the future.

The following example is included to provide a "real life" model of administrative synthesis, a model which could be duplicated in any elementary school fitting the conditions described in this paper's introduction.

Administrative synthesis: Ardmore Elementary School, a model. Ardmore School, designed ten years earlier to be an "open concept" school, was assigned a new principal. Principal Smith found that the existing staff members had self-selected Ardmore School because of their preference for team teaching, individualized instruction, multi-age grouping of students, and student participation in making decisions. Teachers were assigned to a three or four-member team with responsibility for 75-100 students, all located in a unit which contained four teaching stations and a common area. Five such units were grouped around a central support area which contained the library, office and staff workroom.

At the time of Principal Smith's appointment, the staff indicated an interest in participating in inservice which would improve their teaching skills. During her first year at Ardmore, Principal Smith assisted the staff in identifying student and staff needs. These were prioritized, and the

greatest needs were identifed as (1) developing the staff's skills in resolving conflicts and (2) improving the students' writing skills.

Principal Smith believed that both of these needs could be addressed through a cohesive staff effort which could bring unity and purpose to the school. It was apparent that, although the teachers valued each others' individuality, they needed to develop group consensus-building and problem-analysis skills. Each teaching team functioned as an entity, with minimal cross-school involvement. The actions taken by Principal Smith were purposefully designed to develop group process skills as well as to meet the identified needs. The chronology of Principal Smith's actions will demonstrate how she applied the skills of administrative synthesis to this situation.

1. Principal Smith established a steering committee to brainstorm ideas, formulate hypotheses and consider alternatives. This committee reported to a staff advisory council which met weekly to consider the operations of Ardmore School. Each advisor represented a constituency (a teaching team, group of specialist teachers, or non-certificated staff), and interacted with this constituency so that all views were represented. Steering committee recommendations were brought to the advisory council for approval or revisions.

2. External resource people were invited to meet with the steering committee. Faculty from a nearby university

participated in the design of the inservice. Experts in the field of conflict resolution and the teaching of writing were contacted and became a part of the design phase.

3. Principal Smith became aware of a possible source of additional funding through a grant. The steering committee wrote the application, based upon their knowledge and understanding of the inservice priorities, staff preferences and available resources.

4. The principal, steering committee and staff advisory council secured the written commitment of the entire staff for the grant proposal. This commitment was readily obtained because the product represented the involvement of all staff at one stage or another.

5. Two major activities were planned after the grant was secured. One, a college course, was designed to assist teachers with the instruction of writing skills. This course was conducted at Ardmore by a writing consultant. Class sessions were held every other week, and the consultant worked with teachers in their classrooms for a period of time each week. Every classroom teacher participated in the writing course, as did the principal, counselor, reading specialist, music teacher and librarian.

The second activity featured a staff week-end retreat at a nearby conference center, with three follow-up seminars during the fall. The retreat and seminars were planned and conducted with the assistance of a consultant in communication

skills. The staff gained understanding of conflict resolution techniques and had opportunities to apply those techniques during the sequence of events. The second activity also provided college credit, and was attended by one hundred per cent of the Ardmore staff.

6. Principal Smith facilitated the implementation of the inservice project by taking deliberate actions which served to maximize the results. She assisted with the allocation of resources by bringing in the writing consultant as a part-time staff member, budgeting funds, monitoring the project timeline, becoming an "adjunct professor" to offer follow-up sessions to the retreat and seminars, and by summarizing the events as they were completed. She participated in all of the workshops and seminars, and practiced the skills and techniques with groups of students. Principal Smith sought to model the conflict-resolution techniques that had been presented in the seminars. She invited teachers to share their uses of techniques and the results that were obtained. Whenever possible, Principal Smith "labeled" and publicized the teachers' applications of their new skills. She accomplished this through her classroom observations and conferences, written notes to teachers, verbal comments in meetings, sharing of events with parents, and feedback to inservice presenters. Student writing was displayed around the school and featured in parent newsletters. Samples of student writing were read at staff meetings, and students

were given the opportunity to participate in a creative writing fair held at a nearby university.

7. Finally, the principal assisted the staff with an overall evaluation of the inservice project which had brought about many changes in teacher behavior. The results of the evaluation indicated that the teachers were pleased with their acquisition of teaching skills, the teachers and students were beginning to demonstrate new skills in resolving conflicts, and student writing scores improved dramatically. Student attitudes about writing also improved, and parents noted the increased competency in writing, evident in the many samples of student work. The principal was gratified to note the cohesiveness of the staff when working together to identify and solve problems. She noted the groups' improved ability to accomplish tasks, and the individual members' abilities to assume varying roles. The staff expressed the desire to continue with this inservice model during the following school year.

In summary, this inservice project for Ardmore School produced real changes in teachers' behavior. Throughout the life of the project, the principal's role featured <u>administrative synthesis</u>, the ability to combine the old and the new situational elements in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before.

IV. THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE AGENTS

If the reader accepts the author's assumptions that the principal is a key to change in the schools, and that the principal's ability to perform administrative synthesis, is critical to gaining staff commitment to change, the implications for change agents are clear:

1. Focus attention on the principal of the school. Seek his/her support for proposed changes. Show how the proposed changes can benefit students or meet needs of the school. Clarify the principal's role in the process of initiating, implementing, and evaluating the results of change.

2. Check the principal's perceptions about change itself, about his/her sense of self and school identity and control, about the school system and its supportive elements, and about staff members' ability to participate in decisions affecting them and the school. If negative perceptions exist, seek to determine the cause(s) and to develop a working relationship with the principal. If the principal's perceptions are such that s/he demonstrates a desire to maintain the status quo, a preference for a laissez faire or passive "management" style, an attempt to ward off the "interference" of the school system rather than to utilize its supportive services, or a lack of faith in the teachers' ability to participate in the decision-making process, the prognosis for lasting

change in his/her school is extremely bleak. It is, of course, possible to change the principal's perceptions, and this becomes the first priority for the change agent. The process for building a climate for change within a school district is not different from the process for building a local school climate, described in this paper. It is a process that does take time; however, it can be accomplished, if the change agent works through the process deliberately and sequentially. In other words, if the principal's perceptions are inhibitors to bringing about change in the school, change the principal's perceptions. The only alternatives to this are to forget the possibility for making changes at that principal's school or to reassign the principal!

3. Promote holistic thinking by presenting information and providing opportunities for the principal to consider the total perspective, to perceive how the proposed change fits within the system and how it relates to the purposes of his/her school. Work with the principal to demonstrate the manner in which the design of the change "project" can be determined by the local school staff. Arrange for meetings of all principals who may be involved in proposed change, to widen their perspective regarding the scope of the project and to enhance their consideration of a variety of possible approaches to the change. Bring together the principals and "experts in the field," again for the purpose of extending the thinking of the principals beyond their own schools and school systems.

4. Provide an instructional model for the principal. Determine the principal's skill level in administrative synthesis, and teach to the objective of raising that skill level. "Teaching" implies a design that includes classes or seminars, opportunities for practice, situations in which the principals discuss and demonstrate the results of their application of concepts, and evaluations which give relevant information. "Teaching" implies that the change agents model the skills of administrative synthesis, and label those skills in such a way that the principals gain a perception of "what it looks like."

5. Develop a complete communications network between the change agent, the principals involved in the project, the staff who will be participating in the project, and any external "experts in the field." Ascertain the nature of the communications network in each school unit, which must include "regularities" that permit interrelated communications among the administration, staff, students and parents. If an adequate school network does not exist, assist the principal to design one that will permit complete communications. Again, the change agent should provide instruction which is appropriate for the skill level of the participating principal.

6. Provide opportunities for principals to consider the future impact of the changes being proposed. Assist them to develop goals for their schools which reflect the needs of students, involving staff and parents in the process.

Emphasize the cyclical nature of the process which includes the setting of goals, the design of strategies, the implementation of activities, the accumulation and analysis of data, and the determination of effectiveness (evaluation), which leads to the setting of new goals and a new cycle.

7. During the implementation phase, continue to monitor the processes that were established during the planning phase. Facilitate the principal's efforts to think holistically, to provide instructional modeling for staff, to communicate thoroughly, providing for the authentic participation of staff, and to consider the future effects of change. Give particular attention to pre-established check-points to emphasize the feeling of local control and ownership and to give direction to adjustments that are needed.

8. In the summative evaluation phase, assist the principal and staff in understanding how the results relate to their goals and objectives. Proclaim, teach and check for the understanding that evaluation is cyclical in nature. How does the evaluation relate to original goals? How do evaluation results assist the school in planning new goals? Assist staff in deriving meaning from the evaluation results, and in sharing the results with parents.

SUMMARY

The elementary school principal can be identified as the key to change in the schools. In the past decade, the principal's role has continued to emphasize instructional leadership tasks as well as organizational development tasks. Frequently, though the role expectations have changed, the training and preparation which would assist the principal in fulfilling the new role expectations have been lacking. Those who would change the schools have often by-passed or manipulated the principal, apparently perceiving him/her as a roadblock to change rather than a facilitator of change. The principal certainly can be that roadblock; however, change agents who assume that the principal is the key to change can assist that individual in causing, not merely allowing, change to occur.

The creation of a climate which encourages change is the responsibility of the school principal. His/her ability to develop this climate is dependent upon his/her perceptions of the nature of change, the locus of control, the supportiveness of the school system and the abilities of staff to participate in decision-making. The principal's positive perceptions of each of these four areas enhance the development of a nurturing, supportive school climate.

Assuming that the elementary principal is the key to change, the focus for change agents is placed upon assisting

the principal to utilize (or develop) skills of administrative synthesis. The successful innovative principal synthesizes the elements in a situation by combining them in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before. Operating at the synthesis level assumes that the principal has analytical skills as well, thoroughly understanding each of the various situational elements. The interrelationships of the elements become the focus of synthesis. The principal can develop the school's ability to perform as a cohesive entity only if s/he can conceptualize the "whole" so as to visualize how innovations could lead to new possibilities.

Once the principal perceives the gestalt, s/he must be able to bring the staff along in a sequential manner, through the application of sound instructional practices. The principal, as "teacher," is careful to model the concepts s/he wishes the teachers to employ. Throughout the "instruction," the principal keeps the gestalt clearly in mind and establishes a school-wide communications network which permits him/her to monitor the understanding of his/her staff. The principal structures the communications network in such a manner as to permit the authentic participation of all staff members in the operations of the school.

Finally, the principal continually provides opportunities for the staff to think about the future. S/he perceives the necessity for organizational and self renewal, and seeks to

share this perception with staff. New goals are established based upon evaluation of "old" goals; change becomes growth based upon enduring elements of the situation. Staff members come to view change positively, and are willing to risk in the climate of trust that has been established.

The principal--key or roadblock? Facilitator or inhibitor? The perception makes all the difference.

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